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TAGS: [PBTS](#) [PREL](#) [SNAR](#) [IR](#) [AJ](#)

SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN DENIES PRESS REPORTS THAT IRANIAN  
BORDER CROSSING CLOSED

Classified By: Ambassador Anne E. Derse for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) According to Azerbaijani independent newspapers Zerkalo and Ayna, Iran closed its main border crossing with Azerbaijan on April 3. These reports claimed that Iranian customs officials had closed the Astara border crossing because "thousands" of Iranians were seeking to enter Azerbaijan. When asked to comment, an Iranian Embassy official in Baku reportedly told the Ayna journalist that the border crossing was temporarily closed due to "bad weather conditions."

¶2. (C) According to the Chairman of the Azerbaijani State Customs Committee, Aydin Aliyev, the Astara border crossing was never closed on April 3. In fact, Aliyev reported to Embassy EXBS Advisor that 1.5 kilograms of heroin had been seized at the Astara border crossing on April 3. During an April 4 interview with ANS Television, Deputy Chairman of the State Customs Committee, Ilham Mehdiyev, also reported that the Astara border crossings was never closed on April 4. Elchin Bashirov, the MFA America Desk Officer, told us April 4 that he had heard no indication in the MFA that the border had actually been closed, and noted that the MFA would have issued a statement if it had been closed.

¶3. (C) Separately, in an April 3 telcon with the Ambassador, Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Mammadyarov stated that the MFA was monitoring whether an increased number of Iranians were leaving Iran for Azerbaijan and, if so, whether it was due to increased international tensions with Iran or coincided with the recent Novruz holidays. Mammadyarov reported that the GOAJ was now monitoring the flow of Iranians seeking to enter Azerbaijan and recording the number of vehicles crossing the border each day. The Ambassador noted her intention to address through media interviews this week erroneous press reports that the US would attack Iran on April 6; Mammadyarov noted the value of the USG publicly addressing rising concerns in Azerbaijan, especially in light of the reports.

¶4. (C) Comment: As tensions between Iran and the international community have heightened, so too has speculation, often wild, in the Azerbaijani media. A number of Azerbaijani newspapers carried stories that the US will attack Iran "at 0400 on April 6." In such a heated environment, what may simply have been prolonged delays at the Astara border crossing associated with Novruz holiday travel could easily have been misconstrued or manipulated. We will continue to get the facts out publicly. End Comment.  
DERSE